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ABSTRACT

This paper describes school restructuring efforts undertaken since 1991 in the Virginia Beach Public Schools (Virginia). These efforts are based on a resolution adopted by the school board in December 1991, which supported the implementation of school-based management and shared decision making. Several common restructuring themes were shared by the district and business: reducing bureaucracy, developing a customer-service orientation, sharing decision making and increasing participation, recreating the culture, and empowering employees. Since 1991, the district has eliminated 115 central office administrative positions, tried to apply the Golden Rule to all personal interactions, initiated the Parent Perception Project, piloted a leadership evaluation process, established the Traditional Discipline plan, created faculty councils and school planning councils, utilized strategic planning for school improvement, enacted school performance measures, created teacher cluster groups, and implemented curriculum guidelines within which teachers tailor their own instructional plans. (LMI)

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Experimental Session 2B

Lessons from Restructuring Works in Progress

SHERATON WASHINGTON • LOBBY LEVEL
Virginia Suite C
Washington, D.C.
Saturday • March 27, 1993 • 1:00-4:00 p.m.

Sidney L. Faucette • Superintendent
Virginia Beach City Public Schools • Virginia Beach, Virginia

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Restructuring:

Leadership and Change for Virginia Beach Schools

The Virginia Beach City Public Schools have embarked upon a major effort to "restructure" the organization from top to bottom and across all facilities, positions, and functions. This major effort is based on a resolution adopted by the School Board on December 17, 1991—the "Resolution of Support for School-Based Management and Shared Decision Making."

Following the adoption of that resolution, I prepared an extensive report on its implications, highlighting the actions necessary to carry out the intent of the School Board. On January 21, 1992, I presented the full report, called simply "The Restructuring Report," to the School Board. You should have copies of the full report and the resolution in your packet.

Since that time, the school system has been awash with terms like *faculty councils, client evaluation, customer service, traditional discipline, accelerated schools, downsizing,* and many more. Sometimes we wonder how we got into all this and also where we're going with these new ideas. ■

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I. The Context for Restructuring.

A. The National Scene.

So, to remember how we got into all this, let's recall the education news of the early 80s. For years, the press had reported that American high school graduates were scoring lower and lower on S.A.T.'s. This trend created a feeling of unease and upset, and people offered all sorts of explanations like "too much T.V." and "not enough homework." But no one knew exactly how to solve the problem.

Then, in 1983, under the direction of Terrel Bell, President Reagan's Secretary of Education, a special commission published *A Nation at Risk*, which pretty well summed up the causes of the distress. After *A Nation at Risk*, there were other reports from other commissions, all more or less in the same vein. They all boiled down to alarmingly poor performance on the part of schools and alarmingly difficult challenges on the horizon, challenges such as increased immigration, changing demographics, inadequate technology, increased need for services to children and families, and shrinking financial resources.

Most educators didn't want the responsibility for this doom and gloom and didn't know how to change things, anyway. So a good many politicians, corporate executives, and civic leaders took over. They began what became known as the "school reform movement." In Virginia, however, the response to the reform movement of the 80s was rather guarded. Virginia's policymakers simply did not get on that bandwagon, although they fully recognized the need for Virginia students to be well prepared. In the late 80s, the Virginia State Board of Education began efforts to set standards of performance for students.

Also, during the 80s, the news from the business world went from "totally wonderful" to "frightening." Early in the 80s, you remember, people were indulging in dreams of easy money. And we saw the rise of junk bonds, insider loans at S&L's, insider trading at investment firms, speculative real estate ventures—you name it, we were all going to get rich quick. Only we didn't. We just about killed the goose that laid the golden egg. By the end of the 80s, the national economy was in pretty bad shape.

So, Americans began the 90s seeing the need for major overhauls of both education and business. American institutions looked like dinosaur organizations—old, outmoded structures that just didn't work right any more. We were looking at businesses that sold products they couldn't repair or wouldn't repair and made everybody mad in the process. We were looking at schools that graduated youngsters who couldn't read or write and made everybody mad in the process.

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Today's resulting strenuous efforts, then, to overhaul, streamline, and reorganize both businesses and schools, gave rise to the term *restructuring*. It was as if we had to have a new term just to show how far-reaching and forward-looking are the measures we are now taking. Now the term *restructuring* covers all such efforts to create and recreate our organizations and institutions, whether in education or business.

B. The Virginia Beach Scene.

In the Virginia Beach City Public Schools, a period of great stability and steady accomplishment—the long superintendency of Ed Brickell—came to an end in the 80s, when Dr. Brickell retired. This happened just as the system began to experience demographic changes, such as increases in minority enrollment and immigrant students; a slowdown of population growth and economic development; community concerns about graduates who were not well prepared for either higher education or the workplace; and, then, the downsizing of the military.

As you saw from the displays—possibly you picked up a copy of our *School Guide* from our display—Virginia Beach is a city of great diversities. First, the city limits encompass the resort strip known as "the Beach," four military installations, residential neighborhoods of many socioeconomic levels, many shopping centers, farms, and golf courses. To serve this geopolitical entity, we have 78 schools, serving 74,000 students.

Second, we also have considerable cultural diversity. Our minority population is about 18 percent, mostly African American, but also including a substantial and well-established Filipino population, and a few Asian Americans, Native Americans, and Hispanic Americans. Military dependents account for 40 percent of our student enrollment and for the transient nature of our student bodies. Twenty-five to 28 percent of our students receive free or reduced-price lunches.

So the local scene did not precisely mirror the national scene, but it almost did. What's more, the community had concerns about schools that pertained directly to Virginia Beach. And the School Board and I were eager to reestablish stability and to put in place restructuring initiatives to address those concerns about education in our city.

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II. Common Themes in Restructuring.

Schools and businesses have entirely different, and somewhat opposite, missions, but there are several common themes in restructuring efforts in both. Here I'll describe those themes as they appear in our restructuring initiatives.

A. Flattening the Organization and Reducing Bureaucracy.

So let's "begin at the very beginning," as the song from the *Sound of Music* says. If the Number One theme in restructuring is reducing bureaucracy, how do our specific projects and initiatives accomplish this?

1. **Administrative reorganization.**
   In Virginia Beach, our most visible, but not necessarily most popular, attack on bureaucracy is the sweeping reorganization of central office positions and functions. This effort began about six months before my arrival, and the School Board and I have vigorously pursued continuing it. We have now downsized the central administration by 115 positions. The human cost of eliminating and reorganizing positions is great, both to staff who must find a new job or change assignments and to those who must work much harder to fill the needs of their clients. However, the savings are estimated at $5.1 million per year, impressive savings in a time of revenue shortfalls.

2. **Strong emphasis on "killing" the bureaucracy.**
   But the most important attack on bureaucracy, in my view, is our strong vocal emphasis on "killing" the bureaucratic practices that were so negative and counterproductive in the past. You know what I mean—when clients get the "runaround." When it takes days or weeks or months to get a response to a simple request for service. Or when employees convey the notion that whatever you need them to do isn't their job.

   We know that practices like these are just not effective in meeting the needs of the people we serve. I have repeatedly insisted that we can move beyond bureaucratic practices—kill the bureaucracy—and I will continue to press for better ways of relating to others, better ways such as sharing information, talking directly to one's fellow workers about problems, accepting responsibility for tasks, and, basically, just applying the Golden Rule in all our interactions.

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B. Developing a Customer Service Orientation.

Now, to move to the second theme, let's specifically address matters of customer service and customer satisfaction.

1. **Definitions of clients and customers.**
   I don't want to get into a long discussion here in order to pin down a precise definition of customers and clients. For our purposes, it's enough to define customers and clients as the people we serve—primarily students, parents, citizens, and our fellow employees. There may be more than one group or type of people we serve, and all of us serve both internal and external audiences or groups. Nevertheless, I think you'll understand the concept clearly in the five specifics of customer service I'm going to spotlight today.

2. **Client Evaluation Project.**
   First, we have launched a Client Evaluation Project—now known as the Parent Perception Project. This effort, undertaken at my insistence by a Task Force of teachers, has produced a questionnaire and survey procedures for asking parents how their children's classroom teachers are doing. All Virginia Beach class room teachers have been invited to participate in this survey, and more than 1,700 have volunteered for the field test this spring. Maybe you picked up a brochure, "Growing Together in Education," that explains this project.

   The overwhelmingly important aspect of this project is that teachers are asking an external audience—the parent—a major client of teaching services, how these teaching services are really viewed and valued by the client. Isn't it strange that numerous teacher evaluation systems are in place across the country and none of them ask parents, "How're we doing, teaching your kids?"

3. **Other customer service initiatives.**
   Second, it's not enough to ask parents to comment on the work of teachers. I have also insisted that principals look at their faculties and staffs as clients or customers. They, too, will be asking their faculties and staffs "How'm I doing?"

   Third, major service departments in the school system are also being required to assess their quality of customer service. For example, our technology service department and school plant staffs now regularly leave customer service cards when they perform their work for people in the schools.

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Fourth, the directors at central office are now piloting a leadership evaluation process that includes a customer service element; instructional coordinators are soliciting feedback about their services to school staffs; and as for me, trust me, the School Board fully understands and explains to me the kinds of service it expects from me.

Fifth, the Traditional Discipline plan is also an effort directed at customer service and satisfaction. Traditional Discipline is a sort of "tough love" set of policies and regulations, supported by sending a Code of Student Conduct home with every student, to be read and discussed with the parents or caregivers. It is based on the idea that every child and every educator deserve a safe and secure environment for learning and teaching. All parents deserve the confidence of knowing that their children are safe in their schools.

Without this kind of safety and security for achieving the mission of our schools, we would continue to lose public confidence and public support. Traditional Discipline demonstrates that our schools are good places to live and work and learn—and I call that a basic requirement for satisfying our clients' needs.

C. Sharing Decision Making and Increasing Participation.

Naturally, when we flatten the organization, there are fewer bureaucrats to make decisions. So we share decision making with people who care about their schools, including people who work in the schools, people who send their children to the schools, and the community which benefits from a well-educated citizenry and work force. So the third theme of restructuring is involving people who care in making decisions about the work of the organization. Among the specific elements in the Virginia Beach initiatives that reflect shared decision making, the most visible are the Faculty Councils and the School Planning Councils.

1. **Faculty Councils and School Planning Councils.**
   The main purpose of the Councils is to provide vehicles for shared decision making, to more or less formalize that process, and to ensure that people who care most about their schools can solve problems at their schools, together. You'll find the guidelines for these councils in your packet, on a memo dated April 29, 1992. I've also included Sample Bylaws for these councils.

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At this point, almost every school has its Faculty Council and School Planning Council up and running. Some of these councils are, naturally, much farther along than others. They began with a true election—not appointment—of teachers to the Faculty Council, have determined their operating rules, have sought training, and have initiated their strategic planning processes. Others have encountered delays or obstacles along the way, but all are persisting; and I'm sure we'll see much growth and development in the ways these councils work during the next few months.

2. **Strategic planning and school improvement.**
Shared decision making occurs not only as these councils operate, but also in the processes I've insisted they use. What I'm talking about are the process of strategic planning and the process of school improvement. I have not prescribed exactly which model of strategic planning to use nor indicated which variety of school improvement is my favorite. Rather, I have set broad directions for both kinds of processes, and both require shared decision making.

In every model, strategic planning requires broad participation in envisioning the community's future and the future of the school system. Further, strategic planning requires, once more, the participation of many in setting the broad goals and objectives of the plan and in creating the more specific action plans to achieve the bits and pieces of the larger goals.

School improvement plans dovetail rather nicely with strategic planning. You might say they overlap. The point here is that school improvement plans, whatever the model, require the participation of all stakeholders—everyone who has a stake in the success of the school. So, whether you prefer the Comer School Development Model, the Accelerated School Model of Henry Levin of Stanford University, the Effective Schools Model, or the Total Quality School (based on Total Quality Management), or something altogether different, you will find yourselves interacting with everyone who cares about your school or department. Why? Because you can't improve things without participation—it's that simple! In other words, you'll find yourself sharing decision making, just the minute you are serious about restructuring your organization.

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3. **School Performance Measures.**
The concept of shared decision making also extends to the new accountability measures we have been working on—the School Performance Measures. These were developed by a committee of community leaders and educators, who identified the measures of quality revered by the community. Their discussions were wide-ranging, as you can imagine, but eventually they had to select only those measures that the schools had control over. However, my point here is to illustrate that even in matters of accountability, we must share decision making with parents, citizens, and colleagues.

Our display contains copies of the newsletter *Kaleidoscope* for March 1993 that describes where this project stands now. We are arranging training sessions to help our Faculty Councils and School Planning Councils apply the School Performance Measures within their strategic plans. We are also preparing informational materials to help people grasp the idea. Once they are understood and used by the Faculty Councils and School Planning Councils, these Measures can be monitored by school faculties and parents to see whether individual school improvement efforts are paying off in measurable ways. And, across the division, the School Board and I will also be able to monitor the School Performance Measures and, we hope, to distinguish the "performing" from the "nonperforming" schools. Then we'll be able to analyze the patterns and allocate resources to address the needs of the schools having difficulty.

Just remember: when we people share in making the decisions that affect them, we can expect excellent benefits, such as:

- better, more practical decisions;
- shared responsibility for putting the decisions into action:
- shared ownership of the results; and
- more productive use of limited resources.

These are the results that make shared decision making and increased participation worthwhile.

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D. Recreating the Culture.

Fourth, restructuring also means recreating the climate and/or the culture within the organization. It means building an invigorating, energizing climate that includes (1) shared information, (2) open and direct communications, (3) a spirit of teamwork and togetherness, (4) the development of trust and confidence in oneself and in each other, and (5) a willingness to try new things, take risks, forgive mistakes, and forge ahead with better ideas as they come to us. We must eliminate unnecessary competition, open up channels of communication, learn to resolve petty conflicts, learn to facilitate thinking and problem solving rather than merely to hand down orders from above.

But before we can achieve this kind of climate, we must be serious about the purposes of schools. In Virginia Beach, we are building a very serious policy context for school operation. Traditional Discipline is part of that serious context, as is the institution of the School Performance Measures. The School Board has also employed an Internal Auditor, who will screen all course offerings and instructional programs for their academic rigor and will offer a performance incentive for administrators. Once this tough policy floor is well established under us, we'll see that parents take us seriously and students take us seriously. We'll find that educators are more productive and focused on their jobs. Then we'll have every right to expect community leaders and ordinary citizens to respect the job we are doing.

To set the example for open communications, I have initiated Cluster Groups or Communications Teams. These are job-alike groups which come together regularly to ask questions and give answers. I meet once a month with four Teacher Cluster Groups in order to find out what issues are on their minds, what resources they need in classrooms, and what information they need to work productively.

In addition to open communications within the organization, I have emphasized open and direct communications with the public, with employees, and with the media. Schools manage most of their own public information efforts, unless an event has systemwide implications.

We have developed responsive staff development programs to support school efforts and systemwide efforts. And we've organized a few symbols and events along the way such as the party to "bury" bureaucracy and the Family and Friends 1992 Convocation—a nonmandated meeting, with down-home music and coffee and sweet rolls.

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This theme, these efforts, are often the ones that take longest to bear fruit because it takes time for people to learn teamwork, trust, and cooperation in place of the old bureaucratic practices. The old bureaucracies didn't spring up overnight, they required years to build and years more to go rigid on us. The new culture will take a while to become established—but my view is that's no excuse for failure to begin.

E. Empowering Employees.

Now, naturally, if we shift more responsibility to the schools and away from the central administration, if school faculties and parents share decision making, if we share information all across the school system—then, clearly, employees are "empowered." You could say that "empowerment" works in two major ways, which I call the DOWNside and the UPside of empowerment.

First, employees are held accountable for achieving results. For example, the School Board continues to set policies and directions in the curriculum, but teachers have major responsibilities for selecting the instructional strategies necessary for achieving the broad curriculum goals. Teachers then have the professional latitude to tailor instructional plans to the needs of their students so as to get better results from their particular groups.

(It may be wise here to stop for a moment and distinguish between decisions that are made by teachers in groups—such as the structure and content of systemwide curriculum guides—and decisions that are made individually by each teacher in the classroom—such as approaches, techniques, and materials that appeal to specific students or the use of timely events or trends that showcase particular skills or content. Certainly I am not advocating that each teacher in each classroom should completely write his or her own curriculum. There is too much wisdom in the collective, cooperative efforts of curriculum committees and textbook committees for me to suggest that an individual teacher should ignore that professional knowledge. All teachers can work within the professional guidelines set by curriculum committees and still assume major responsibilities for the tailoring of instruction to meet the needs of their own students.)

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Now back to the topic of accountability. As employees make more and more decisions about what is appropriate in their professional judgement, they will acquire more accountability for the results they achieve, as well. I used an example from teaching, but there are other examples—the professional judgement of custodians, food service workers, clerical and secretarial help—the people who actually do the work need to have decision making power over aspects of that work, simply because they know more about it than anyone else.

And to some employees, that added accountability sounds bad, threatening, the "DOWNside" of empowerment. It's hard to make the shift from "carrying out orders" to "making professional decisions." As long as I'm just carrying out orders, I can always blame those orders and the people in the bureaucracy who handed down the orders for my results.

But the "UPside" of empowerment is taking charge of one's own work, feeling ownership for everything you do, taking pride in your work, and feeling fulfilled and productive. The UPside of empowerment makes employees much more than cogs in a machine! It frees them to become fully functioning, psychologically healthy, high-producing human beings. The tricky part is that you can't have the UPside without the DOWNside.

Learning how to feel and work like an empowered employee means you have to give up blaming others (the old bureaucratic way) and practice solving the day-to-day problems everyone deals with. It means you have to give up secrecy (the old bureaucratic way) and practice sharing information in order to solve the day-to-day problems. But you keep trying—you learn to "reach out and touch" responsibility a little every day, and pretty soon you are functioning very well as an empowered employee, and perhaps even serving as a good example to everyone you work with, and feeling very proud of your work and of your work group.

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III. Why Are We Doing This Anyway?
The Vision of a Transformed Organization

Why are we doing this, anyway? What's all the upheaval, the change, about? Why we are inventing the future for ourselves and Virginia Beach?

Well, when you think about the "dinosaur" organizations, outmoded structures that were no longer working well, no longer responsive and helpful to their customers, no longer efficient and effective in achieving their missions, you can imagine that we want just the opposite. What we are doing is recreating our school system, transforming it from an outmoded bureaucracy into a responsive, human service organization. For a while, let's think together about what that means. Let's look into the future and imagine ourselves as part of a network, a team of employees, serving our customers well, and setting new standards of professional conduct. What would such schools be like? What would such a central organization look like?

Now, as you know, much of our framework will not change, that is, the legal portions of our organizations. And many of the administrative and teaching functions will remain the same, and the supportive departments will remain important parts of the organization.

In our restructured schools, however, a new human relations climate will prevail. We are working for the day when parents are truly made welcome in our schools, when children feel warmth and support and firm discipline every day for their growing-up efforts, when all our efforts are directed at serving our students—then we'll know we're achieving the mission of public schools. In this transformed world, we'll experience the absence of paranoia, we'll feel a sense of security about who we are, what our purposes in life are, and how proud we are of our work. We'll find that everybody talks to everybody, that all are treated with respect, and that all believe in and commit to the mission of schools.

My deepest commitment is for the mission of the schools in Virginia Beach—academic excellence for all children—but it doesn't stop at the city limits. There are matters of national pride and national effectiveness at stake; in restructuring schools and restoring public confidence in education, we're doing our part to affect the nation's future positively and productively.

Thank you.

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